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REMARKS

The Office Action mailed June 15, 2006 has been carefully considered along with the references cited therein and the Interview Summary provided by the examiner and the applicant. The most recent non-final Office Action treated claims 7, 9-16 and 18-22. The indication of allowable subject matter relative to claims 16 and 18-22 is appreciated. Claims 7, and 9-15 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Noll et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,060,820) in view of Gagnon et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,078,128). New claims 23-27 have been submitted to provide a more complete scope of protection for the subject invention. Reexamination and reconsideration of the application as amended are respectfully requested.

The examiner relies on Gagnon for its teaching from the combined references that the eyelet has a substantially homogenous strength characteristic along its length. As previously discussed with the examiner, the thin wall sections 42 of the eyelet 26 in Gagnon preclude a homogenous strength characteristic. By incorporating the limitation from original claim 9, it is clear that the wall in Gagnon does not have a substantially uniform thickness (see Fig. 4 of Gagnon and col. 3, l. 57- col. 4, l. 10). Accordingly, claim 7 as amended defines over any fair teaching of Gagnon, as well as the combined teachings of Noll and Gagnon. Claims 10-15 that depend directly or indirectly from claim 7 are deemed patentable for at least these same reasons.

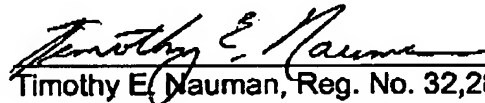
New independent claims 23 and 27 are presented to provide a full range of protection for this invention. Again, both of these claims and the claims dependent therefrom define over the Noll and Gagnon patents, as well as the remaining art of record.

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CONCLUSION

All formal and informal matters having been addressed, it is respectfully submitted that this application is in condition for allowance. Alternatively, if the Examiner is of the view that the application is not in clear condition for allowance, it is requested that the Examiner telephone the undersigned for purposes of conducting a telephone interview to resolve any outstanding differences. Accordingly, an early notice of allowance is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,
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